

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 384 719

CE 069 294

TITLE Women: The New Providers. Whirlpool Foundation Study, Part One.

INSTITUTION Families and Work Inst., New York, NY.

SPONS AGENCY Whirlpool Foundation, Benton Harbor, MI.

PUB DATE [95]

NOTE 11p.

PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.

DESCRIPTORS Adult Education; Educational Background; *Employed Women; *Employee Attitudes; Employment Practices; *Family Work Relationship; Futures (of Society); Sex Role; *Values; Work Attitudes; Work Ethic

ABSTRACT

A study conducted interviews with a nationally representative sample of 1,502 women, as well as focus groups across the country, to develop a new portrait of women's views on family, work, society, and the future. On several key questions, their views were compared to a representative group of 460 U.S. men and representative samples of 1,005 women and men in Canada and 499 women and men in Mexico. Findings indicated that women were the "new providers." Most women fully accepted the provider role--both its nurturing and economic aspects. Family remained at the core of what was important for all women. Education was critical to how women fared. It predicted not only her earnings and benefits, but attitudes toward her life and the vision she had for the future. Women brought to work what the workplace needed, but they were not getting what they needed in return. Women were very concerned about employers providing fewer benefits and about the difficulty of integrating work and family life. Working fewer hours, which both men and women preferred, reduced the likelihood of having the benefits families needed. Rhetoric about family values was misplaced. Women felt that the current debate about family values should focus on valuing families of all types and the way people behaved toward each other, not the structure of the families in which they live. Women called for a more caring society. They believed that people caring about each other was the pivotal first step to solving society's problems. (YLB)

* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *

ED 384 719

WOMEN

new

pro

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)

☒ This document has been reproduced as
received from the person or organization
originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to
improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this
document do not necessarily represent
official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL
IN OTHER THAN PAPER COPY HAS BEEN
GRANTED BY

C. Keast

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES
INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

WOMEN: THE NEW PROVIDERS

Whirlpool Foundation Study

Part One

by Families and Work Institute

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Whirlpool
FOUNDATION

CE 069 294

"Women's work" today means something very different than it did in the past. Whether in the home, in the community, or at the workplace, women perform a variety of roles. Describing the place that women assume in society today calls for new models and a new language that better represents and values their contributions. Building on traditional models, political ideologies, assumptions, or advocacy positions, this study asks women themselves to define their roles and their concerns.

The findings presented in this report are based on interviews with a nationally representative sample of 1,502 women, as well as focus groups across the country. On several key questions, their views are compared to a representative group of 460 U.S. men, as well as to representative samples of 1,005 women and men in Canada and 499 women and men in Mexico.

The study presents a definitive new portrait of women's views on family, work, society and the future.

Several noteworthy themes emerge:

- **Women are the "new providers."** Women fully accept the provider role—both its nurturing and economic components. Most women fully accept that work and family responsibilities do not detract from one another; they are both essential. Family remains at the core of what's important for all women, whether they work inside or outside the home.
- **Education is critical to how women fare.** Education predicts a great deal about a woman's life, not only her earnings and benefits, but attitudes towards her life and the vision she has for the future.
- **Women bring to work what the workplace needs, but they are not getting what they need in return.** Women are very concerned about employers providing fewer benefits and about the difficulty of integrating work and family life. Furthermore, working fewer hours, which both men and women would prefer to do, reduces the likelihood of having the benefits families need.
- **Rhetoric about "family values" is misplaced.** Women overwhelmingly feel that the current debate about family values should focus on valuing families of all types and the way people behave toward each other, not the structure of the families they live in.
- **Women call for a more caring society.** In contrast to the harshness and mean-spiritedness they see around them, women believe that people caring about each other is the pivotal first step to solving society's problems.

THE NEW PROVIDER—CHALLENGING THE ZERO-SUM MODEL

As women's participation in the paid workforce has grown, there has been widespread concern that women would neglect, subordinate, or even renounce their caregiving and nurturing roles within the family. Likewise, it has been assumed that women's commitment to the workplace diminishes to the degree that they are committed to a caregiving and nurturing role in the family. In this study, women themselves challenge this zero-sum model of their roles at work and home.

On the one hand, women are committed to caregiving, give that role a central place in their lives, and feel positive and supported in that role. In general, they feel good about their families' well-being and link that well-being to healthy family relationships. Women who are at home full-time caring for their families seem most satisfied with their current lifestyle.

- Regardless of their employment status, almost nine in ten women—88 percent—agree that they are responsible for taking care of the people in their families, and 94 percent say that they feel very or somewhat valued by family and friends for fulfilling responsibilities at home.
- About twice as many say that things are going fairly well for their families (60 percent) rather than very well (31 percent). When asked to define success at home, approximately half mentioned either having good relationships or having healthy, well-adjusted children.
- At the same time, women's interest in work outside the family is growing. Employed women are providing a critical component of their families' incomes, and employment appears to enhance—not diminish—their feeling of being valued at home.
- Women who work full time are more likely to feel more valued at home than those who work part time or are at home full time caring for their families (63 percent versus 56 and 57 percent, respectively).
- Fifty-five percent of employed women provide half or more of the household income: 18 percent provide all, 11 percent provide more than half, and 26 percent provide about half of the family income.

This "new provider" role — encompassing breadwinner and caregiver responsibilities — is one that women embrace, though they are troubled by the time pressures they experience.

- Even if money were not a consideration, a plurality of women (48 percent) would choose to work part time or full time. Thirty-one percent would choose to work at home caring for the family, and 20 percent would select volunteer work—up from 13 percent in 1981.
- Asked if they would like to give up some of their responsibilities, a majority (56 percent) disagree.
- Nine out of ten women report experiencing time pressures. In fact, a plurality of women mentioned not having enough time together as a family as their greatest family concern.
- Experience of a "time famine" may be more a national phenomenon than a gender issue. Asked whether they would choose to have more time or more money, both men and women in the United States chose time much more often than men and women in Canada and Mexico.

WOMEN HAVE WHAT THE WORKPLACE NEEDS— BUT DOES THE WORKPLACE OFFER WHAT WOMEN NEED?

Due to a more competitive economy, rapidly changing technology, and a global marketplace, the workplace is demanding a new type of worker. But the needs of that worker — the new provider — may not be fully acknowledged by the workplace. While women exhibit the characteristics that employers increasingly need, they are concerned that what they need—benefits, a caring workplace, and a work-life balance—is not being made available to them.

In their approach to work, women seem to exhibit commitment, internal motivation, a concern for quality, a desire for lifelong learning, and a flexible, independent approach to work—all characteristics that are considered essential for the workplace of the future.

- Asked to explain in their own words how they gauge their own success at work, a majority of women (51 percent) stress the quality of their work. External rewards (promotions and paychecks) are success criteria for only 11 percent of women.
- Two-thirds of women are either currently enrolled in (11 percent) or interested in enrolling (55 percent) in a degree program. Interest is especially high among low-income women, who see education as a key to bettering their lives. Sixty-two percent of women with personal incomes of \$15,000 or less are interested in enrolling in a degree program.

- Many women already have experience with flexplace work arrangements. More

than half of employed women do work for their jobs at home at least some of the time.

Less-than-full-time work is an option that both women and men desire to a greater extent than is currently available. The terms "full time" and "part time" should be understood to be relative rather than absolute descriptions because many women work more than a 40-hour week. In choosing the option of part time, women may be saying that they would like to work fewer hours than is normal in a full-time position.

This interest in reduced hours presumably stems from a desire to be able to balance work and personal time and to better fulfill both the nurturing and economic aspects of a provider role. Women who work part time exhibit attitudes similar to those in full-time jobs, suggesting that part-time workers are not as "different" as is often assumed.

- If money were not a concern, twice as many women would choose part time (33 percent) over full time (15 percent).

States, Canada, and Mexico would work part time if they could afford to do so.

- Interest in having both work time and personal time transcends gender and national boundaries. Approximately one-third of women and men in the United

- Approximately one-third of women working part time consider their jobs a career. They feel valued on the job to virtually the same degree as women who work full time.

Women's greatest worries about the workplace concern employers providing fewer benefits, and the difficulty of balancing work and family responsibilities. Ironically, the choice of part-time work may give more time with the family, but usually precludes access to benefits—which are also critical to family support. Thirty percent of women working reduced hours have access to benefits compared with 78 percent who work full time. Women's concerns also illustrate the pervasive influence of the workplace not only on women who are employed but also on those who are not: The workplace dispenses wages and benefits, as well as strongly influences the stresses and satisfactions that spouses bring home.

- Fifty-six percent of women worry a great deal about employers providing fewer benefits. More than four in ten worry a great deal about balancing their work-family responsibilities.

- Issues of work-family balance affect the

family, whether or not both spouses in married families are employed. Women who are not employed in the paid labor force are troubled to a greater degree by workplace pressures that spill into family life than are women who work outside the home.

"FAMILY VALUES"—REFRAMING THE DEBATE

When asked about societal issues, women express universal concerns for children, lack of child care, the poor quality of education, and a range of social issues. But the biggest problem that they see and the most obvious solution are one and the same: People need to care more about each other.

Women seem most concerned about what they see as the "mean-spiritedness" of our times and a general lack of caring in society. Interestingly, U.S. men as well as women and men in Canada and Mexico register considerable concern about the same issue.

- Seventy percent of women report that they worry a great deal about people not caring about others, and give it a higher rating than for every other societal concern.

- More than eight in ten women and men in the United States, Canada, and Mexico say that they worry a great deal or somewhat about "people not caring about others."

In keeping with the emphasis on caring, women define "family values" as being about relationships, loving, and taking care of one another. U.S. men, as well as women and men in Canada and Mexico, agree with this definition. Virtually all women think that society should value all types of families.

- When asked to say what family values means to them in their own words, nine in ten U.S. women define family values as loving, taking care of, and supporting each other (52 percent), or knowing right from wrong and having good values (38 percent).

are the basic definitions of family values.

- U.S. men, as well as Canadian and Mexican women and men, concur that these

- Only two percent of U.S. women and one percent of U.S. men define family values as being about the traditional nuclear family. Ninety-three percent of U.S. women think that society should value all types of families—not just certain types of families.

ASSESSING THE PROSPECTS FOR CHANGE

Looking ahead, women express a combination of hopes and concerns about whether things will be better for the next generation of women and tomorrow's families. They are most optimistic about their abilities to influence change close to home -- and are least hopeful about being able to affect social change. The theme of the need for caring extends into the future as a call to action.

Women feel strongly that the next generation of women will have more opportunities than they have had, but this optimism is bounded by their belief that lack of advancement opportunities and difficulty in balancing work and personal life will continue to be workplace worries for the next generation of women. With regard to family and social worries, women think that neighborhood crime, families having enough time together, and the quality of education will continue to be concerns of the next generation.

- Eighty-nine percent of women believe that most girls expect to someday have both a career, or a job, and a family. Likewise, 85 percent of women believe that young boys expect to have wives with a career, or a job, and a family. Thus, issues related to being a new provider are expected to increase.

- Women are both optimistic and concerned about women's chances for advancement in the workplace. While 80 percent of women believe that the generation of women younger than themselves will

have more opportunities than they themselves had, a plurality of women also believe that the lack of opportunity to get ahead will be the greatest workplace concern of younger women.

- Twenty-five percent of women think neighborhood crime and safety will continue as the greatest family worries for younger women. Nearly a quarter say that the greatest social worry will be whether education adequately prepares young people for the future.

As an indication of change in a positive direction, women report that they encourage their children to become comfortable with diversity. However, beyond improving things for themselves and their families, women doubt whether they can create change, and seem to be asking for the involvement of society and its institutions.

- Women are encouraging their children to get to know people who are different from themselves to a greater extent than the women themselves have. The vast majority of mothers caring for children under the age of 18 (82 percent) encourage their children to spend time with people who are different from themselves.

- While almost all women in the United States believe they can improve their own lives at least somewhat (97 percent), less than two-thirds believe they can affect life at all beyond their own communities.

SUMMARY CONCLUSIONS

A study of women's attitudes and concerns might be expected to produce a list of findings on topics usually described as "women's issues." While not denying the importance of these issues, women interviewed in this study say that they care most about fostering a more caring environment in the home, at work, among all families—and in society. By incorporating these issues in the agenda for women, the nation would be responding to women's hopes and concerns.

This study also finds that education proves to be a key predictor of how well women are coping with life's demands, are providing for their families, and are feeling personally affirmed and confident. Thus, women's strong interest in furthering their own education is a positive sign—and is one of the most direct ways our country could positively influence the welfare of women and families.

The findings from this study also call for an end to the debate about whether women should or shouldn't work. The new provider role is here to stay, and a goal for this country is to support women and men in these new roles—especially in providing access to more diverse work patterns and less-than-full-time work with decent pay and pro-rated benefits.

This study shows that women are well-suited for the workplace of the future, in terms of their emphasis on the quality of their work and their pursuit of learning. Women will continue to be a valuable resource to the nation's economy.

Women take personal responsibility for their families and feel positive about this role, but their optimism stops short when they assess their ability to influence change in the larger society. Like the nation as a whole, women seem uncertain about the appropriate relationship between personal responsibility and collective social action. This study, however, calls attention to "caring" as a "back to basics" approach that must underlie the solution to all problems—in families, in the workplace, in communities, and in the nation.

BACKGROUND

Women: The New Providers is the result of a three-way partnership between Whirlpool Foundation, Families and Work Institute, and Louis Harris and Associates, Inc. Whirlpool Foundation envisioned a study that would look at the important and relevant family, work, and social issues facing women in the United States. An active pursuit of nonprofit partners resulted in selecting Families and Work Institute to conduct the study. In turn, Families and Work Institute subcontracted with Louis Harris and Associates, Inc., to conduct interviews with a nationally representative sample of women.

The study was expanded during the course of the research by asking some of the same questions of a representative sample of men in the United States, as well as men and women in Canada and Mexico.

This North American comparative study has become the first step in a global research strategy for Whirlpool Foundation. A similar study will be conducted in Europe in 1995 and in Asia in 1996. And, a comparative study across three regions—to surface commonalities and barriers related to integrating work and family—will be conducted in 1997.

This research has two purposes. First, Whirlpool Foundation is committed to making a social contribution by focusing public attention on the critical issues facing contemporary families. Second, the findings from this study will help inform future Whirlpool Foundation grant-making.

In order to design the U.S. study, Families and Work Institute conducted a series of focus groups with women in several parts of the United States, including Ohio, New York, Mississippi, and California. Participants included rural and urban women; women at home and women who are employed; and women of diverse incomes and ethnic backgrounds. To supplement the focus groups, Families and Work Institute staff interviewed leading experts on contemporary work and family life: researchers, business leaders, educators, foundation leaders, and journalists. The methodology wasn't designed to presuppose the issues of concern to women. Instead, it was designed to listen to the women directly and to base the empirical study on their words—their worries, their hopes, their satisfactions, and their stresses.

Drawing upon the insights of the focus groups, expert interviews, and other studies conducted by Families and Work Institute and by Louis Harris, the three partners worked together on the design of this survey.

Louis Harris and Associates, Inc., conducted interviews with a national cross-section of 1,502 women between the ages of 18 and 55. These interviews were conducted on the telephone between November 18 and December 8, 1994. Where applicable, comparisons are made to earlier Louis Harris and Associates research, especially a 1981 Study of Family Values. For a select group of questions, comparisons are made to a representative group of 460 men between the ages of 18 and 55 who were interviewed between February 6 and 9, 1995. In addition, these same select questions were asked of a representative sample of 1,005 Canadian women and men between February 9 and 18, 1995, and of 499 Mexican women and men between March 24 and 26, 1995 by MORI de Mexico.